DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 051 480 AC 010 390

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TITLE The Role and Spread of Mass Media and Its Impact on Economic Development of Underdeveloped Countries.
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented in part at Annual Conference of American Association of Agricultural Editors (Cornell Univ., Ithaca, N.Y.)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Communication (Thought Transfer), *Developing Nations, *Economic Development, *Mass Media, *Telecommunication
IDENTIFIERS Brazil, United Arab Republic

ABSTRACT

This research study delineates the role and spread of mass media and its impact on economic development of underdeveloped countries. Some definitions about mass communication are given, followed by a brief description of how the mass media in the countries of the world operate under four major theories. An examination is made of the economic development process itself, along with a listing of the contributions communication and the mass media have made to social and economic development. The problem of frustrations as created by the mass media is discussed, together with how mass media spread. Data are presented on the distribution of mass media, primarily for the underdeveloped countries of Brazil and the United Arab Republic. (Author/DB)

ED051480

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The Role and Spread of Mass Media and Its Impact Economic Development of Underdeveloped Countries*

By Alexander R. Gavitt, Jr.**

Introduction

For centuries most of the world's population have had their environment shaped by their individual and collective experiences. Man was limited in his direct contacts with others based on how far he could walk in a day. There was no radio, no television, no newspaper, no professional communicators to transcend his experience beyond peasant society. The world for these people was in village or communal living. Their society was influenced by the social hierarchy (mostly word-of-mouth communication from elders) and by immediate past experiences in the community. However, the range of this direct experience was greatly widened by the recent appearance of the airplane, the road, the automobile, the bus. "Much more profound," Milikan stated, "has been the explosive extension of vicarious experience through the printed word, the radio, the motion picture."(1)

Milikan went on to point out: "We have only recently begun to think seriously about the management of this revolution (communication) in the service of human welfare... If the new societies are to take advantage of the opportunities modern technology opens to them of manipulating their environment, their members must radically widen their perception of choices they can make in their daily lives in ways for which their direct and inherited experience gives them no guidance whatsoever. The heart of this process lies in vicarious experience to which the key is modern communication."(2)

Objectives

The purpose of this research study is to delineate the role and spread of mass media and its impact on economic development of underdeveloped countries. This will be done by first presenting some definitions about mass communication, followed by a brief description of how the mass media in the countries of the world operate under four major theories. This serves to provide a framework upon which we can gain a broader perspective of the mass media in underdeveloped countries.

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*This research paper was presented in part at the 54th annual conference of the American Association of Agricultural College Editors, Wednesday, July 15, at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.

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Attention is then turned to an examination of the economic development process itself, along with a listing of the contributions communication and the mass media have made to social and economic development. Next the problem of frustrations as created by the mass media will be discussed, together with how mass media spread. Finally, some data will be presented on the distribution of mass media, primarily for the underdeveloped countries of Brazil and the United Arab Republic (formerly Egypt).

Definitions of Terms and Concepts

At this point it is appropriate to define several terms as used in this study. First, the term underdeveloped countries refers to those countries in which per capita real income is low ($600 and under) when compared with the per capita income ($1,000 and over) for the United States of America, Australia, Canada and the countries of Western Europe. Examples of underdeveloped countries with low per capita income include Brazil, El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, Iran, and the United Arab Republic.

Communication refers to the process of transmitting man's intentions, feelings, desires, knowledge and experience between individuals.(3)

The term mass communications refers to a special kind of communication involving the following operating conditions: nature of the audience, the communication experience (message), the communicator and the communication channel.

Nature of the Audience.--Mass communication is directed toward a relatively large, heterogeneous, and anonymous audience. This means that messages addressed to specific individuals via letters, telephone calls, and telegrams are not customarily regarded as mass communications. Rather, messages conveyed in newspapers and over radio and television stations may be thought of as mass forms of communications. By a large audience is meant any audience exposed during a short period of time and of such a size that the communicator could not interact with its members on a face-to face basis. The second requirement is that the audience be heterogeneous. Mass communicated news is directed to an aggregation of individuals occupying a variety of positions within the society — persons of varying ages, both sexes, different levels of education, from many geographic areas and so on. Finally, the requirement of anonymity means that the individual audience members generally remain personally unknown to the communicator.

Nature of the Communication Experience.--Mass communication may be characterized as public, rapid and transient. They are public because their content is open to public surveillance. They are rapid because the messages reach large audiences within a short time, or even simultaneously. Last, they are transient because they are usually intended to be used right away and are thus regarded as expendable.

Nature of the Communicator.--The communicator or message sender in mass media works through a highly complex, organized organization involving an extensive division of labor and usually a large outlay of expense.

Nature of the Communication Channel.--The communicator transmits a message through a communication channel such as the newspaper, radio, or television or a combination of these or all three simultaneously.

This section has presented several definitions of terms dealing mostly with mass communications. Our discussion now turns to alternative systems of mass communications which have been developed in different societies, so that we can gain a better perspective on the communication systems of underdeveloped countries.

Four Theories of Mass Media

Three social scientists in international mass communications have recently viewed the communication systems of the world as operating under four major theories.(4) They are as follows:

1. Soviet-Communist.--The mass media are committed to carrying out Communist theory and policy to the people or the masses. The media rally support for the Party and government and are intended to raise the general level of culture among the people. Soviet communications involve strict review and control over the media and content by the government.

2. Libertarian.--It dominates the Anglo-American and many other Western countries. The media operate under a minimum (and if possible) no government restriction. There is emphasis upon freedom of the media and freedom of expression within certain limitations. Material considered libelous and obscene are, of course, not permitted by the Courts in the mass media.

3. Social Responsibility.--This theory, which is also evident in the Anglo-American tradition, places more emphasis upon the moral and social responsibilities of persons or institutions which operate the mass media. The public or audience often is provided information and an opportunity for discussion of important social issues. In many cases the mass media in Western nations is seen to operate under both the Libertarian and Social Responsibility theories, with some experts indicating that there is a trend toward the latter concept.

4. Authoritarian.--Under this theory the media are most often found in the predominantly agricultural, less developed countries, with the system of mass communications being rather limited. The media may be public or privately owned, but their main function is "to support and advance the policies of the government in power; and to service the state."(5) There are strict governmental procedures of licensing and censorship of the mass media. This permits the government to exercise strong restraint of any criticism of itself as well as from public officials.

There are two significant characteristics of communication systems in underdeveloped countries, which are discussed below. They are, first, the extensiveness of group exposure to the mass media, and, second, the operation of word-of-mouth-communication which is often linked to the mass media. There is every reason to believe that these two features still exist in these countries today (also may be found in industrial countries), despite a slight alteration in the communications system.

To illustrate both of these characteristics, let us look at a study of radio listenership in four Arabic countries — Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.(6) Results of this investigation, conducted by the Bureau of Applied Social Research of Columbia University in 1952, showed that the majority of people in these countries listened to radio at home. However, a sizeable minority — about 30 percent — listened outside the home, usually in schools, clubs, at work, friends or neighbors, local coffee houses, or elsewhere. Listening outside the home — in group situations — was more likely to be the pattern of the poor and destitute than for the minority of well-to-do citizens.

> This analysis of general radio listening in four Arabic countries has turned up one phenomenon which, by American standards, is uncommon. That is the great amount of listening which goes on outside the home — in coffee houses, in homes of friends and neighbors, and so on. These guest listeners, who are such by necessity rather than by choice, are the poor and uneducated segments of the population who cannot afford to buy radios. But, despite difficulties which they have in hearing radios, they are a sustained audience. More than half of them claim to listen almost every day. And large numbers, although not a majority, report they they plan their listening in advance.(7)

The role of word-of-mouth or informal communication is seen in the second important feature of the Arabic radio audience:

> Recent studies of personal influence show how important word-of-mouth communication is, even in countries where the formal media are well established and widely distributed. It is all the more important in the Middle East where for centuries it has been the major channel of influence and where the newer media, which might supplant it, have not yet been fully developed.(8)

In this study of Arab radio listeners, 10 percent of the respondents reported that they usually relied on other persons to supply them with the news. An additional 25 percent used both mass media and word-of-mouth communications for their news. Thus, over a third of the audience depended on word-of-mouth as their primary source of news. Moreover, dependence on word-of-mouth communications was very prevalent among those people with the least amount of formal education as contrasted with the college educated which received their news primarily from the radio.

The preceding presented a concise description of the operation of mass media in the world under four major theories. This was necessary to view in broader perspective the operation of the mass media in underdeveloped countries. Now we will turn our discussion at how modern communication and the mass media contribute to social and economic development of developing countries (underdeveloped). Before doing so, it is first necessary to view briefly the development process itself. After that, there will be a discussion of the "harmful" effects mass media play in underdeveloped countries, followed by how the media spread and how they are distributed in the underdeveloped world.

The Economic Development Process

It may be said that all theories of economic development agree that there must be rapid economic productivity for economic growth of any society to take place. Lerner observed that when a rise in real income becomes significant:

> It enables the society simultaneously to raise both demand and saving. We have seen that otherwise, in a poor society, small increases of income tend to be consumed promptly — with nothing left over for saving, hence investment. But when income rises rapidly enough to permit higher consumption and also higher saving, then the growth cycle is initiated. Higher investment leads to capital improvement and rising productivity, which in turn raise real income enough to encourage both higher saving and demand. Thereby higher investment is again stimulated — and the growth cycle becomes self-sustaining.(9)

Thus, "the basic dynamic of economic development," as Schramm pointed out, is: "save and invest in productivity."(10)

Before any country makes the decision to promote and expand industry, it must have developed to a certain level its agriculture, human resources including educational institutions, and what some economists call "social overhead." The latter include basic transport, irrigation power facilities and communications. Essentially, a developing country must channel its investment income in all these sectors of the economy. Its development plan must be balanced and show evidence of growth on a broad front.(11) Modernizing agriculture, upgrading human resources, improving industrial skills, production and efficiency — all these developments take much time. They cannot be accomplished overnight; they require a great deal of human change.

While many developing countries favor industrial growth expansion, attention must also be given to the agricultural sector of the economy. Here, it is important to increase the productivity of livestock and crops and at the same time take steps to modernize and mechanize agriculture to feed the population adequately. This will release workers from the farms for employment in industry. In highly developed countries such as the United States and Canada, only 7 to 20 percent of the labor force is needed to produce food for the population. On the other hand, in underdeveloped countries the proportion of persons engaged in agricultural occupations is much higher, ranging from 25 to 90 percent.(12) Moreover, agricultural productivity is much lower in these countries and therefore it is difficult in many cases to meet the food and fiber needs of the ever increasing population.(13)

As was pointed out previously, it takes a great deal of time, effort and money to engineer human change. And yet, as Milikan and Blackner noted: "The paramount requirements of change in any society is that the people themselves must change."(14)

Contributions of Communication and the Mass Media to Social and Economic Development

Communication is viewed here as the point where it becomes so important for economic development. Explained Schramm: "The task of the mass media of information and the 'new media' of education is to speed and ease the long, slow social transformation required for economic development, and, in particular, to speed and smooth the task of mobilizing human resources behind the national effort."(15)

According to Schramm, the development of communications must be made to help the people in at least six different ways.(16) Communication must be used:

1. To contribute to the feeling of nation-ness,
2. As the voice of national planning,
3. To help teach literacy and other necessary skills,
4. To help extend the effective market,
5. To help prepare people to play their new parts, and
6. To prepare the people to play their role as a nation among nations.

More specifically, the mass media can promote the climate of economic development in several different ways. The media have the ability to report and inform the people on a variety of matters. They can help broaden horizons and help to develop the quality of empathy (the capacity to see oneself in the other fellow's situation). They can focus attention on certain topics such as political campaigns, a new agricultural practice, or a new health program. They can raise aspirations; they can create a desire on the part of individuals to desire a better life. This element of raising aspirations will be discussed further in succeeding paragraphs.

The mass media can help only indirectly to change strongly held attitudes or valued practices. They can infer status and prestige upon an individual; they can provide a way to build leadership among political leaders in developing countries. They can broaden political discussion and policy making at the village level. They can enforce social norms for development behavior and to police deviations from these norms. They can help form tastes such as in music and art. They can affect attitudes lightly held, and slightly canalize stronger attitudes. They can be of great help in all forms of teaching, adult education and skills training.

Revolution of Rising Expectations

It is one thing to develop communications to help people through economic development; it is another to bring it successfully to reality. The plan for economic development in underdeveloped countries has given rise to the revolution of rising expectations. During the 1950's there was an abundant spread of economic development projects in many of these countries. It was assumed that if a new dam was built or a new agricultural practice was adopted, then it would generate the modernization process automatically. But people began to experience frustration

and bitter disappointment because progress was not being made as fast as it was hoped. Despite this, people for the first time acquired a sense that a better life was possible for them under the spectacle of economic development.

Revolution of Rising Frustrations

In the 1960's there was a different kind of mood reflected among the people of the underdeveloped world. Rising expectations continued to spread among the people; however, at the same time a counter revolution was taking place. There was a revolution of rising frustrations — peoples' aspirations were exceeding their satisfactions. This relationship can be expressed in the following equation as adopted from a formula of William James:(17)

$$\text{Satisfaction} = \frac{\text{Achievement}}{\text{Aspiration}}$$

It is typical that aspirations outrun achievements; thus, people get much less than they want. Consequently, this leads to a serious imbalance in this ratio which gives rise to frustrations. People get much less than they want because they are so dissatisfied with the progress made toward goals set by their peers.

Lerner listed six agents of social change that affect the ratio between the level of achievement and the level of aspiration. They are:(18) the economy, the police, the family, the community, the school, and the media. We will be concerned only with the mass media insofar as they are a major instrument of social change. The mass media bring new aspirations to the people and dissatisfaction conceived as frustration of aspirations. Despite the frustration risks, the mass media continue to spread among the underdeveloped countries of the world. Finally, modernization (conceived as maximization of satisfaction) can succeed if a corresponding communication theory and practice are followed.

It can be argued that the media teach people participation in government by depicting them in new and strange situations and by familiarizing them with a range of opinions they can choose. It also can be said that the media have been used to stimulate people in one way or another. It does so by raising their levels of aspirations — for the good things in life. In all too many cases, however, there is no adequate provision made for raising the levels of achievement; thus, frustrations spread.

The level of economic development is a major condition which determines whether the mass media spread in underdeveloped countries. Lerner observed that "mass media spread in a direct and monotonic relationship with a rising level of industrial capacity."(19) Another condition for the spread of mass media is the ability to produce and maintain physical plants for the production of media products (newspapers, books, magazines, etc.). Cash, literacy and motivation are other conditions that determine the spread of mass media products. The media will flourish if and only when all of these conditions are met within society.(20)

Distribution of the Mass Media

It has been determined that the mass media can play a significant role in the economic and social uplift of two-thirds of the world's people. Schramm confidently expressed: "If the mass media or some equally potent and rapid means of information were not available, it would be utterly impossible to think of national economic and social development in terms of the timetables that are being attached to such development today."(21)

Let us, therefore, look at the availability of the mass media in two underdeveloped countries: Brazil and the United Arab Republic. This will be followed by some general comments on the availability and the use of the media in the world.

A look at the data in Table 1 reveals that there was 217 daily newspapers in Brazil in 1954 as compared with 227 in 1964, with the peak year being 1960 (291

Table 1.--Number of Daily Newspaper Copies per 1,000 People in Brazil and the United Arab Republic: 1954-1964.

Country and Year	Daily Newspapers	
	Number	Cir. per 1,000 Pop.
Brazil		
1954	217	51
1955	235	50[a]
1956	290	63
1957	233	50[b]
1958	---	--
1959	252	60
1960	291	54
1961	---	--
1962	264	53
1963	255	54
1964	227	32
United Arab Republic		
1954	---	--
1955	---	--
1956	---	--
1957	---	--
1958	46	20
1959	---	--
1960	---	--
1961	---	--
1962	33	17[c]
1963	9	15
1964	---	--

Source: United Nations Statistical Yearbook, 1954-1964.

[a]Circulation figures relate to 223 dailies only.

[b]Circulation figures relate to 181 dailies only.

[c]Circulation figures relate to 7 dailies only.

dailies). More significant is the fact that there was a downward trend in the circulation of dailies per 1000 individuals, ranging from 60 in 1959 to 32 in 1964. Expressed another way: there was 1 daily newspaper published for every 243,873 people in the country in 1960. For the United Arab Republic, the data are mostly unavailable or unreported. In spite of this, in 1958 there were 46 dailies in this country as compared with only 9 in 1963. In 1958 there were 20 papers per 1000 individuals as compared with 15 in 1963. Based on 1960 population figures, there was 1 daily (1963 figure is used) for every 2,898,369 people in this country.(22)

The data in Table 2 show a much higher newspring consumption per individual in Brazil over the United Arab Republic. The figures for the 1954 period were 2.8

Table 2.--Newsprint Consumption, Kilograms, per Capita, per Inhabitant in Brazil and the United Arab Republic: 1954-1964.

Brazil		United Arab Republic	
1954	2.8	1954	1.0
1955	2.9	1955	0.9
1956	2.9	1956	1.1
1957	3.6	1957	0.8
1958	3.2	1958	1.2
1959	3.3	1959	1.2
1960	3.2	1960	1.3
1961	2.9	1961	1.9
1962	2.6	1962	1.5
1963	2.6	1963	1.6
1964	2.3	1964	1.4

Source: United Nations Statistical Yearbook, 1965-1964.

and 1.0 for the respective countries; in 1964 they were 2.3 and 1.4. Thus, it can be readily seen that there was no noticeable long-term rate of growth in newsprint consumption for both countries during this 1954 to 1964 time period.

Examination of the data in Table 3 shows that radio has been growing much faster than newspapers and television in Brazil and the United Arab Republic. Also, there was steady growth in the number of television receivers or licenses for each country.

The significance of these data shows that there is relative scarcity of the mass media, particularly newspapers, for these countries when compared with the total populations of highly developed countries. For example, current figures for the United States show that it has a daily newspaper circulation of about 1 copy for every 3 persons and nearly 1 radio set per person.

UNESCO has suggested that every country should aim to provide for every 100 of its inhabitants 10 copies of daily newspapers, 5 radio receivers, 2 cinema sets and 2 television receivers. In a report to the United Nations, UNESCO stated:

Table 3.--Number of Radio Receivers and Television Receivers in Brazil and the United Arab Republic: 1954-1964.

Country and Year	Radio Receivers		Television Receivers	
	Code[a]	Number	Code	Number
		(thousands)		(thousands)
Brazil				
1954	R	3,500	R	70
1955	-	-----	-	-----
1956	-	-----	R	150
1957	R	4,570	-	-----
1958	R	4,000	R	700
1959	R	4,570	R	850
1960	R	4,570	R	1,200
1961	R	4,700	R	1,621
1962	-	-----	R	1,430
1963	R	7,200	R	1,800
1964	R	7,500	R	2,300
United Arab Republic				
1954	L	650	-	-----
1955	L	800	R	130
1956	L	850	-	-----
1957	L	1,000	-	-----
1958	-	-----	-	-----
1959	-	-----	-	-----
1960	L	1,500	L	50
1961	L	1,750	L	90
1962	L	1,800	-	-----
1963	L	1,980	L	197
1964	R	1,466	L	273

Source: United Nations Statistical Yearbook, 1954-1964.

[a]The data show either the number of licenses issued (indicated by L in the code column) or the estimated number of receivers (radio) in use (indicated by R in the code column). In many countries, a license may cover more than one receiver in the same household, and the data for number of licenses issued should be used with caution since they fail in varying degrees to represent fully the number of receivers in use.

As many as 100 states and territories in Africa, Asia, and Latin America fall below this very low "minimum" level in all four of the mass media. These countries have a combined population of 1,910 millions, or 66 percent of the world total. An additional 19 countries representing 2 percent of the world population fall below the "UNESCO minimum" in respect of three of the media. In short, nearly 70 percent of the world's people lack the barest means of being informed of developments at home, let alone in other countries.

In point of fact, the actual situation is even worse because the above criteria do not take into account the distribution of facilities within countries. In many underdeveloped countries, over 60 percent of the population live in rural districts, whereas the facilities for information are concentrated in a relatively few urban areas. Consequently, the above very general analysis does not fully reflect the dearth of facilities in the rural areas of most underdeveloped countries, and even of most semi-developed countries which otherwise stand above the "UNESCO minimum" level.(23)

Wilbur Schramm made a study of the distribution of mass communication throughout the underdeveloped world. Briefly some of his major findings were as follows:(24)

1. Latin America is further ahead in the development of mass communication (newspapers, radio and television) than either Asia or Africa.

2. The less developed countries tend to depend on radio to reach their largely illiterate population. South America has moved past the minimum UNESCO standard in radio, while Asia and Africa will reach that standard for radio within a few years.

3. The rate of growth of newspapers is much less than in radio in the underdeveloped countries. This is probably due to the high rate of illiteracy and low educational attainment of the people in these areas.

4. Although Latin America is further ahead in radio and newspapers than in Africa and Asia, there is still a relative scarcity of the mass media when compared with the well-developed countries of the world.

Summary

It has been seen that communication and more specifically the mass media can and do play a significant role in promoting the climate of economic development in underdeveloped countries. At the same time, however, there is danger that the mass media can produce rising frustrations because of lack of adequate provision for raising the levels of achievement among the peoples of the underdeveloped world.

For the most part, the media in underdeveloped countries were observed to be operating under the Authoritarian concept; their main function is to support and

advance the policies of the government. There were two distinguishing characteristics of communication systems in underdeveloped countries: the extensiveness of group exposure to the mass media and the operation of word-of-mouth communication which is often linked to the mass media.

Next we listed the contributions of communication and the mass media in the service of national development. This was followed by noting some of the conditions necessary for spreading the mass media.

Finally, we looked at the distribution of the mass media in the underdeveloped world, particularly for the countries of Brazil and the United Arab Republic. The significance of the data, here, showed that there is relative scarcity of the mass media, especially newspapers, for these underdeveloped countries when measured against the total populations of the more highly developed countries of the world.

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(2) Ibid., p. 4.

(3) Most of the communication definitions come from a booklet by Wright, Charles R. Mass Communication: A Sociological Perspective, Random House: New York, 1964, pp. 11-15.

(4) See Siebert, F., Peterson, T., and Schramm, W. Four Theories of the Press, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956, Ch. 3.

(5) Ibid., p. 7.

(6) Communications Behavior and Political Attitudes in Four Arabic Countries: A Quantitative Comparison, Mimeo, New York: Bureau of Applied Social Research, 1952. For a summary of parts of this study see Brunner, E. deS. "Rural Communications Behavior and Attitudes in the Middle East," Rural Sociology, Vol. 18, no. 2., pp. 149-155.

(7) Communications Behavior, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

(8) Ibid., p. 42.

(9) Lerner, Daniel. "Toward A Communication Theory of Modernization: A Set of Considerations" in Communications and Political Development, edited by Lucian W. Pye, Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 1963, p. 347.

(10) Schramm, Wilbur. Mass Media and National Development, Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 1964, p. 21.

(11) Population scientists report that three-fourths of the underdeveloped countries are above the world average of population growth. Moreover, many of the developing countries presently have low levels of living standards and therefore must increase their industrial and agricultural production to meet the needs of their rapidly expanding population.

(12) In 1950, 58 percent of the population in Brazil was engaged in agricultural pursuits; for the United Arab Republic it was 64 percent in 1947; and for Thailand it was 82 percent in 1960. Source of data is from Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, Production Yearbook, 1962, Rome, 1963.

(13) The rice yields per hectare (yields in 100 kilograms) for Cambodia and India in 1961-62 were 10.5 and 15.1, respectively, as compared with 38.2 and 66.3, respectively, for the United States and Australia. Source of data is from Ibid.

(14) Milikan, M. F. and Blackner, D. L. M. The Emerging Nations, Boston: Little, Brown, 1961, p. 23.

(15) Schramm, Wilbur. Mass Media and National Development, op. cit., p. 27.

(16) Schramm, Wilbur, "Communication Development and the Development Process" in Communications and Political Development, op. cit., pp. 38-42.

(17) James, William. Psychology: Briefer Course, New York, Holt, 1923, p. 87.

(18) Lerner, Daniel. "Toward A Communication Theory in Modernization: A Set of Considerations" in Communications and Political Development, op. cit., pp. 334-335.

(19) Ibid., p. 336.

(20) It must be emphasized again that a modern communication system involves not only a highly organized mass media but also informal opinion leaders who communicate on a face-to-face basis. Moreover, there must be a flow and exchange of information between professional communicators and the influential opinion leaders. In these interactions there are "feedback" mechanisms which produce adjustments in the content and form of the messages.

(21) Schramm, Wilbur. Mass Media and National Development, op. cit., p. 91.

(22) Total population in Brazil in 1960 was 70,967,185; for the United Arab Republic in 1960 it was 26,085,326. Source: United Nations Statistical Yearbook, 1964.

(23) UNESCO, Mass Media in the Developing Countries, p. 16.

(24) Schramm, Wilbur. Mass Media and National Development, op. cit., p. 97.

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